

BOX 9-1 The Balloons Passage

If the balloons popped, the sound would not be able to carry since everything would be too far away from the correct floor. A closed window would also prevent the sound from carrying since most buildings tend to be well insulated. Since the whole operation depends on a steady flow of electricity, a break in the middle of the wire would also cause problems. Of course the fellow could shout, but the human voice is not loud enough to carry that far. An additional problem is that a string could break on the instrument. Then there could be no accompaniment to the message. It is clear that the best situation would involve less distance. Then there would be fewer potential problems. With face to face contact, the least number of things could go wrong.

From Bransford and Johnson (1972)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I understand I don't understand

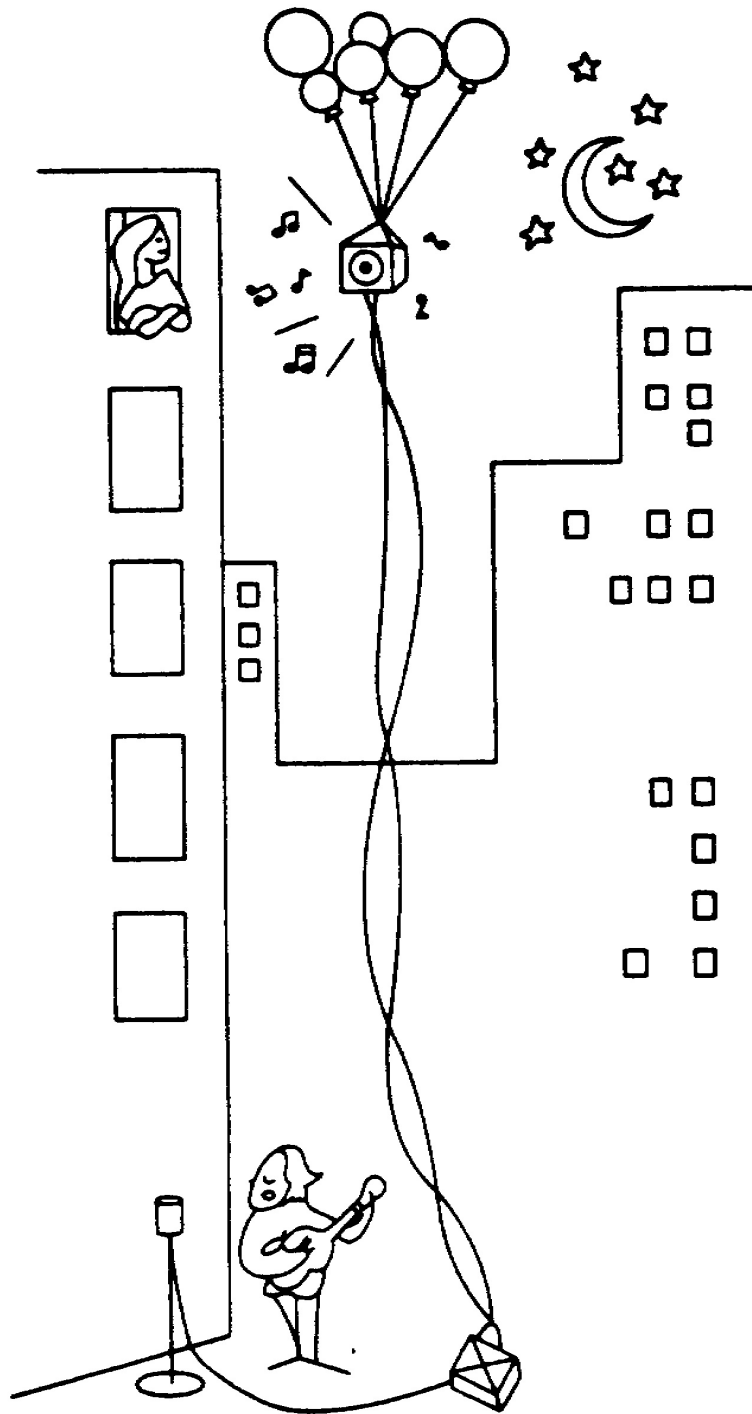
When Bransford and Johnson (1972) gave this passage to subjects, most found it rather difficult to understand, and most performed quite poorly on retention of the passage.

Now, look at the illustration in Box 9-2, which goes along with the passage. Reread the passage in Box 9-1. Do you understand it better now? How would you now rate your understanding?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I understand I don't understand

When Bransford and Johnson (1972) provided this illustration along with the passage, subjects were able to understand and remember it much better.

Why is the passage easier to understand when it is accompanied by the illustration? What does the illustration provide? The passage in Box 9-1 appears out of context and has no apparent theme. The illustration in Box 9-2 provides a context for the passage, what Bransford (1979) and others call a "schema." A schema provides a general structure for the passage and allows you to hold the information together in an overall organization.



From Bransford and Johnson (1972)

